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SUBJECT: Ecuador's Presidential Spokesman Resigns and Criticizes
President Palacio

11. (SBU) The Palacio administration remains rife with internal divisions and instability, most recently reflected in the resignation of the Presidential spokesman. Enrique Proano, Secretary of Communication and spokesman for Ecuadorian president Alfredo Palacio, resigned on Sept. 25, 2006, and publicly criticized president Palacio for neglecting his official duties to focus on his campaign to be elected the next Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO). Proano was replaced by Gonzalo Ponce Leiva, a high-ranking aide at the Secretariat of Communications with ties to current presidential candidate Rafael Correa.

12. (SBU) Proano had worked as presidential spokesman since February, 2006, the fourth spokesman in the last two years. During a 9/25 press conference he held at home to announce his resignation, he made public his frustration. He explained that in recent weeks his communication with the president had become difficult and that the President was ignoring government business as he focused almost exclusively on his WHO candidacy. Proano did not travel with the president on his recent trip to Cuba and the U.S.

13. (SBU) A 9/26 press article on the Proano resignation reported that new spokesman Gonzalo Ponce, while working at the Communication Secretariat over the past months as a special assistant, was in

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charge of publishing a book by president Palacio entitled "Health for the 21st Century." This book, describing Palacio's career, accomplishments as president and a regional proposal for the WHO, was distributed by Ecuador at the recent Non-Aligned Nations Summit meeting in Havana. The president's chief of staff, Rafael Parreno, denied Proano's charges in a 9/26 press conference, and Ponce reportedly stated that the Communication Secretariat has no special unit working on the president's WHO campaign.

14. (SBU) Comment: Gonzalo Ponce is the brother of Javier Ponce, a prominent diplomat at the ministry of Foreign Relations who is in charge of preparing the GOE's "Ecuador 2020" (PLANEX) document, which reportedly contains a clause banning any foreign troops from Ecuadorian soil. Some have speculated that Javier could be a foreign minister candidate under a Correa administration. In addition, Gonzalo Ponce worked as a public relations aide to Rafael Correa in 2005 when Correa was the finance minister, and has touted himself privately as a Correa protege. In a 10/2 meeting with PAO and IO, Ponce said that he did not know Correa before Correa asked him to work for him at the Ministry in 2005, but that now they have a close relationship and friendship.

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